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## THE STUDY OF THE SYSTEMATIC VOCABULARY<sup>1</sup>

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The most important as well as the most difficult problem in the study of a modern foreign language is the acquisition of a vocabulary sufficient to enable the student to express himself adequately in the medium of the new tongue. The various advocates of the reform advise, that the conversational exercises and the connected discourse be based upon the reading material. As is usually the case, however, the reading-text consists of selections of literary German, in itself often inadequate to furnish the necessary material for conversation of value to the student in everyday life. The student of language has a right to demand that such material of practical worth be offered him, that he may quickly and surely be brought to that point where he can readily understand and speak the language he is studying. One of the most obvious deficiencies of our modern-language teaching is the lack of accomplishment in speaking the language. The purpose of this paper is to show the necessity and the possibility of building up a systematic, connected vocabulary, which will furnish the means necessary for the power of expression, so that at the conclusion of his course the student may feel the satisfaction of having at his disposal a sufficient supply of the foreign language substance, with the aid of which he may be able to express himself as occasion demands; that is, a supply of the current concrete expressions of daily life. In fact the more concrete formation of the aims of language-study has brought about a demand for a systematic, well-defined study of words, phraseology, and idioms. The reading-text itself offers ample opportunity to impress and enlarge the vocabulary by reference

<sup>1</sup> The following five papers were read at the German Conference, held in connection with the Twentieth Educational Conference of the Academies and High Schools in Relations with the University of Chicago, November 9, 1907, on the general topic: "The Acquisition of a Vocabulary in a Modern Language."

to the cognates, synonyms, and derivatives, but it does not furnish adequate material for constructing a systematic vocabulary. The purpose of such a vocabulary is to supplement the work of the text, to teach such words and expressions that do not occur in literary German, that is, to effect a practical mastery of the language. A much-felt want will in this way be supplied, for a student realizes, frequently to his regret, that there is a vast difference between the literary language and the language of daily intercourse. Only the person who can speak a foreign tongue thoroughly understands it. It is hoped that the acquisition of such a vocabulary will also aid materially in carrying the student into the foreign spirit, will lead to a more intimate acquaintance of the *Realien*, one of the highest aims of language-study. Modern languages are not studied in our schools mainly for the sake of their form, not even exclusively for the beauty and the value of their literature, but in teaching modern languages we also aim at teaching in the broadest outline and as far as possible the principal features of the institutions, life, character, and thought of the great foreign nations.

Among the first publicly to call attention to the systematic treatment of the vocabulary was François Gouin in his book, *L'art d'enseigner et d'étudier les langues*, published in Paris in 1880. There were others, notably among them Dr. Karl Ploetz of Berlin, but none was as unique in the treatment of the subject as Gouin. According to his theory the cause of the difficulty in acquiring a language lies in the fact that we have failed to follow the greatest teacher, nature. Nature manifests its method in the case of the child. The child combines occurrence (*Vorgang*) and sound (*Laut*) in an inseparable mental association with each other. The process is simple at first, then gradually becomes more complex. The ear is the organ most actively engaged in learning a language. The child learns to understand and speak through hearing many years before he reads or writes. Gouin says that the child after having perceived various objects reproduces them in speech by recalling them to his mind's eye, a process of conception. This mental visualization forms the basis of Gouin's theory. The child

does not begin with declensions, conjugations, rules, lists of roots, and vocables. On the contrary he pictures to his mind what he has previously seen, experienced, and thought. His words then are the expression of either the outer or inner perception. In short, the student is to think in the foreign tongue without the aid of the mother tongue. Gouin criticizes the current methods, because they associate the printed or written word of the foreign language with that of the mother tongue. Furthermore he argues that in the employment of the object picture the mind is receptive; not active, merely passive. While in the acquisition of a mental image the mind is actively engaged, the student must think, and in this way the direct association of the object presented with the foreign word referring to it is accomplished, that is, the student is at once led to think in the foreign tongue. Direct visualization by means of the so-called *Anschaungsbilder* is therefore necessarily limited in its scope. It presents only a single stage of the action, while mental visualization can present everything—a complete picture. We think and understand essentially in images and sentences, and while expressing our thoughts a complete mental picture is ever present before our minds. Everyone, even the poorer student, possesses imaginative power. The mental picture must be presented without the aid of the mother tongue. Every normal person possesses the gift of language in his mother tongue; it can therefore come to him in another. In order to have a practical mastery of a language we must primarily know it thoroughly with reference to vocabulary and grammar. The former is of the greater consequence for our immediate consideration. Let us see how Gouin proposes to teach vocabulary.

We do not think in individual words, but in complete sentences. For example, when thinking of an apple, we also think of the partaking of it. A complete mental picture lies at the bottom of every speech-sound. The verb is therefore the fundamental element of every sentence. It in turn leads to the substantives. The whole current vocabulary of a language is to be taught in complete, short, idiomatic sentences, with particular emphasis upon the verb. The formation of these sentences is to

take place according to a logically chronological sequence. For example, the sentence, "Der Jäger schieszt ein Rebhuhn," is to be thus presented:

Der Hund *sucht*.  
 Er *sucht* und *sucht*.  
 Er *wittert* eine Kette Rebhühner.  
 Er *tut* eine Kette Rebhühner *auf*.  
 Er *steht*.  
 Er *geht* auf Befehl des Jägers *vor*.

Die Rebhühner *bemerken* (*sehen*) den Hund.  
 Sie *fürchten sich* vor dem Hunde.  
 Sie *fliegen auf*.  
 Sie *fliegen* von dannen.

Der Jäger *sieht* die Kette Hühner *davon fliegen*.  
 Er *ergreift* sein Gewehr.  
 Er *legt an*.  
 Er *zielt* und *zielt*.  
 Er *drückt ab*.  
 Der Schusz *geht los*.  
 Die Ladung *trifft* ein Huhn.  
 Das Huhn *fällt* zur Erde.

Each sentence presents a little story, a small image complete in itself. According to Gouin each sentence must be simple and as short as possible. The verb should never have more than two complements. Secondly the exercise should not exceed a certain number of sentences (18-30). He found that the students were very attentive up to the twenty-fourth, but showed signs of restlessness after the twenty-five. If the exercise contained less than 18, it was found that the extent was not commensurate with their powers. As to the sources from which the vocabulary should be drawn, he argues that because of the general deficiency in the use of the everyday language, it should be drawn from this source. He then sets up a systematic treatment of vocabulary as follows: The vocabulary of a modern foreign language consists of about 30,000 words, one-third of which are either technical, obsolete, or purely literary terms, not in common use by the person of average culture. He claims that 6,000 of the remaining 20,000 will suffice for

regular use and serve as a basis of the ordinary intercourse in language. He then divides the words into groups as follows:

1. *Objective*—those terms which deal with the manifestations of the external world, the *non ego*, e. g., *Haus, Tisch, Stuhl, Strasse, Schmiede*.

2. *Subjective*—those terms which deal with the *ego*, the internal world, as manifested in our feelings, opinions, and considerations concerning the objects of the external world, e. g., *hoffen, fürchten, Arger, Schmerz, denken, meinen, glauben*. The objective group is in turn divided into smaller groups (series). The words, *Schmied, Eisen, Hammer, schmieden, glühen*, belong to the series: *der Schmied*. The words, *Jäger, Gewehr, schiessen, jagen, Jagdhund, Rebhuhn, Hase, Hirsch, zielen, treffen*, belong to the series: *der Jäger*. And thus additional groups are formed until the entire content of the objective element of the language is arranged in a natural systematic order. Some words will of course be found in several series, but the most will occupy their proper place in a single series. These smaller groups or special series are in turn grouped under general series. In this manner Gouin classifies the entire objective element of the language under five general series.

1. Generalserie, das Hauswesen, mit den Spezialserien: Ortsbewegung, Kleidung, Wasser, Feuer, Ernährung, Heizung; die gewöhnlichen Arbeiten im Haushalt; Hühnerhof, Stall, Gemüsegarten.

2. Generalserie, die Gesellschaft, mit den Spezialserien: Stellung und Tätigkeiten des Menschen in der Gesellschaft, verschiedene Phasen des Lebens; Schule, Kirche, Kriegsdienst, Spiele, Feste; Krankheiten.

3. Generalserie, in der freien Natur, mit den Spezialserien: Schäfer, Jäger, Fischer, Schnitter, Pflüger, Müller, Bäcker; Wiesen, Obstgarten, Weinberg, Garten, Wald; Gewerbe, die mit dem Ackerbau verknüpft sind.

4. Generalserie, das Handwerk, mit den Spezialserien: Schneider, Schuster, Hutmacher und andere Handwerke und Industrien, die sich auf die Kleidung beziehen; Tischler, Bauschreiner, Schlosser, Maurer und andere auf das Bauhandwerk bezügliche Gewerbe und Industrien.

5. Generalserie, die Wissenschaft, mit den Spezialserien. Elemente und Natur Kräfte; Mineralien; Pflanzen; Tiere; Raubtiere, Säugetiere, Haustiere, Nagetiere; Landvögel; Wasservögel; Fische; Amphibien; Reptilien; Insekten; u. s. w.

The special series previously referred to are then con-

structed into logical arrangements of sentences called themes, which form the working basis of the system; e. g., as above, "der Jäger schieszt ein Rebhuhn."

Inasmuch as man observes the various objects, actions, etc., in the external world, then thinks about them, etc., the transition from the objective to the subjective is direct, and in the same way series and themes are constructed for the subjective element of the language. For example, *glauben* implies *Gewissheit*, *Zweifel*, *Hoffnung*, etc., all manifestations of the inner world, i. e., the subjective side of the language. A combination of the objective and subjective by emphasizing the prevailing image or concept then yields the figurative or metaphorical language, in which a large part of our expression takes place; e. g., "ein Laster ausrotten," "in ein Laster verfallen," "in Laster versinken," etc. But the student must know the objective language before he can appreciate the figurative. After the various series have thus been mastered, the study of literary selections can be taken up. Every piece of literature consists of a series of conceptions, which the author has arranged according to his own logical conceptions. The transcription must, however, conform strictly to the expressions and constructions of the author. Reading and writing are then employed to put the finish to the entire work only after the subject-matter has been thoroughly acquired through the medium of the spoken language.

The above method of acquiring a complete current vocabulary would seem to solve the problem effectively, but unfortunately Gouin, after working out his unique theory and himself successfully applying it in practice, failed ever to publish the complete material. Only a few of the early series had been published at the date of his untimely death, and the vast store of valuable material continues to remain inaccessible. It remains for us to work out the necessary means from the other available sources. Among other publications<sup>1</sup> R. Krons's *German Daily Life*, published by Newson & Co., 18 East Seventeenth St., New

<sup>1</sup> Keetels, *A Collegiate Course in the French Language*, New York: Clark & Maynard, 1880; Menckebach, *Deutscher Anschauungsunterricht für Ameri-*

York, and Dr. Gustav Krüger's *Systematic English-German Vocabulary*, Dresden and Leipzig (1893), C. A. Koch's *Verlagsbuchhandlung*, are especially commendable both for their systematic arrangement and their completeness. Everything pertaining to human life is presented with a rare fulness. They both contain an unusual abundance of current idiomatic expressions for everyday use. Because of their completeness and detail they can hardly be used as textbooks in class, but as a basis for work for the teacher as well as for reference they ought to prove invaluable.

As previously stated, the plan is to build up a systematic vocabulary supplementary to that of the text. The teacher is to work out his series and themes along the lines laid down above, from whatever sources he can procure and present them to the students for entry into notebooks especially provided for that purpose. The material thus acquired is then to be used in conversation (*Erzählungen*) and at times in composition (*Aufsatz*). Great care should be exercised however to present only such material as is relevant, i. e., such as lies within the range of comprehension of the students. In schools that have only a two years' course, this work might be taken up in the latter half of the second year. In schools having three and four years' courses, the later years might be devoted to it. Two years would probably be sufficient to cover the ground, or at least the greater part of it. Time and circumstances would of course determine the stress to be laid upon this work. Frequent reviews are necessary; for that is the greatest assistance toward retaining a vocabulary. Systematic vocabulary thus becomes an excellent means for review and supplement. Furthermore transition to comments on "Land und Leute" is close at hand and composition (*Aufsatz*) logically follows.

From the previous remarks it will be seen that the acquisition of a speaking vocabulary is a prime consideration. The

*kaner*, New York: Henry Holt & Co.; Schmitz, *Deutsch-französische Phraseologie und Vocabulaire Systématique*, Berlin, 1888; Dr. Karl Plötz, *Voyage à Paris*, Berlin: Verlag von F. A. Herbig, 1889; Plötz, *Vocabulaire Systématique*, Berlin: Verlag von F. A. Herbig, 1887.



more the student is held to hearing, understanding, speaking the foreign tongue, and the less he hears his mother tongue, the more opportunity and time does he secure to exercise his powers in the new language with its many idiomatic terms, and thus to acquire the same so much more firmly and enduringly. The acquired vocabulary will be rich and full, and the logical result of this training of the observing and reproductive faculties will be the skill of expression in the idiomatic conversational German. We at once recognize familiarity with a language by a persons' use of idioms. On the other hand, the person who does not know the idioms fails to understand the life of the language. It is hardly necessary to state that a study of isolated vocables is at best incomplete, dull, and unprofitable. In offering a vocabulary in a living connection, we must recognize the most valuable means for its acquisition, for in that manner the real grasp of the meaning, the feeling of the thought-content is a more vital one. It brings about the proper texture in language connection, and a living connection is by all means the most valuable. We need not necessarily follow Gouin's method in every detail; still we can take cognizance of the fundamental principles and with proper adaptations embody them into our language-instruction.

"Prüfe alles; das Beste behalte!"

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## THE STUDY OF COGNATES AS AN AID IN THE ACQUISITION OF A VOCABULARY

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Our subject naturally divides itself into two parts, the study of related words, as to their change of form and as to their change of meaning. Attention has been paid to the first named in two articles published in the *School Review*.<sup>1</sup> In speaking, therefore, of the external changes that cognates have undergone in English and German, we will limit ourselves to an

<sup>1</sup> Vol. X, pp. 60-68; Vol. XIII, pp. 315-23.